AGENDA ITEM: Library of California Reference Program

GENERAL OVERALL PROGRAM UPDATES:

BACKGROUND:

The CLSA State Reference Centers program has never been funded by the state. That program and services are described in Education Code Sections 18760-18764, and the similar (though not identical) LoC services are described in Education Code Section 18853(a).

The LoC program element calls for "access to specialized information expertise and resources statewide to answer information requests generated by its primary clientele that are beyond the capacity or capability of a member institution or public library jurisdiction and its regional library network." It also indicates that "Provision shall be made for information formats specially relevant to culturally diverse populations and persons with disabilities."

As planning for the LoC Reference program begins, the concepts of the unfunded CLSA Reference Centers program are being considered under that broader planning effort, in an attempt to frame a cohesive, complete statewide reference services program that would serve Californians through libraries of all types, and not necessarily continue design of programs fragmented by type of library.

CURRENT STATUS: In accordance with Board direction, the 2001/2002 budget request for Library of California funding did not include any element specifically for the statewide reference components of the Act, pending staff and Board work on further defining those components. At the August 2000 Board meeting staff proposed that a formal review of the statewide reference components be undertaken to provide the Board with recommendations for the future, overall design of a reference program.

The review of the reference scene statewide began with the hiring of the Network Resources Consultant in May 2001. The Network Resources Consultant has been meeting with CLSA System Reference Center Coordinators and other reference-interested librarians, visiting the Reference Centers and other libraries. The visits, which will continue, have heightened sensitivity to and awareness of the program-related issues of greatest concern to librarians around the state. These meetings have afforded the opportunity to identify common concerns and to communicate them to both regional contacts and the LoC team.

Reference Center Coordinators and several System administrators met in Sacramento on October 2, 2001 to begin a group dialog on reference program issues. This group discussed the changing nature of reference activities, development of a definition of reference in the current environment, describing a tentative timeline, and possible elements to include in a statewide reference program. Due to the changes brought to the reference process by the explosion of internet-related capabilities and access,

discussions have begun with a wide view of the reference process. Roles and responsibilities of the several components—regional library networks, statewide programs, etc.—will be considered later in the process. The outcome of this activity is to begin to frame a Library of California reference program. Staff recognizes that while the Act specifies a statewide program, the current trend in reference services is no longer hierarchical, and lines are becoming increasingly blurred. Work with regional representatives will help clarify what reference service is in the current environment. Subsequent meetings, with the next one before February 2002, are to include representatives from regional library networks as well as those from special, school, public, and academic libraries.

In addition to work on the development of a reference program, several elements have been ongoing at the state level, supported to date with LSTA funds. These are First Source and the Virtual Ethnic Resources Center (VERC). Following is an update on these to reference pilot programs.

FIRST SOURCE:
An LSTA grant for 2001/2002 has been awarded to continue testing and assessment of this probable statewide reference services component through the Los Angeles Public Library (LAPL). This year's grant provides CLSA system reference centers with access to a substantial number of electronic resources, delivery of print materials, and prompt technical support; however, based on program evaluation and outcomes, the grant will not continue direct service to the six rural libraries. LAPL has completed an informal evaluation of the effectiveness of the FirstSource service, and that data will be used in developing recommendations to the Board regarding the LoC Reference Program.

VIRTUAL ETHNIC RESOURCE CENTER (VERC)

The Ethnic Resource Center of California project was started seven years ago to provide information to diverse ethnic and non-English speaking groups, specifically those who hold limited literacy skills in English and the native languages. The VERC passed through several iterations and products, both print and CD-ROM, before it came into its web-based form. While the general topic of Ethnic Resources is of interest to librarians and the public, the web-based Ethnic Resource Center does not demonstrate that it actually connects with the target population. The current project has supported a multi-lingual web site; however, no support was provided for updating the content displayed on the site. Staff has recommended discontinuing the Virtual Ethnic Resource Center web site and reassessing the goals of a web site for ethnic issues. The project has been discontinued, pending further assessment. Staff recommends further consideration of this type of service in the planning for reference under the Information and Referral Services section of the Library of California Act. It should be noted that Triadigm Technologies, the firm that provided all of the technical expertise for the VERC, has been caring, committed, highly competent through the duration of the project.

RELATED ISSUES TO COME BEFORE THE BOARD IN THE FUTURE:

1. Discuss and consider a definition of reference to provide direction for drafting a plan of statewide reference support.

2. Consider report of recommendations on alternative implementations of state reference services under the Library of California Act.

3. Review results of studies and projects now underway, such as FirstSource services and the interactive internet services developing throughout the state.

Relevant Committee: Access Services
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